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[zur Startseite](#)**Petersen, Klaus (ed.): 13 Historier om den danske Velfærdsstat. Odense: Syddansk Universitetforlag 2003.**

Klaus Petersen, from the University of Southern Denmark in Odense, is one of the more ambitious scholars of the younger generation who deals with the history of the welfare state in Denmark. In line with the praiseworthy Danish (and Scandinavian) tradition of *folkeoplysning*, in *13 Historier om den danske Velfærdsstat* he edited a collection of essays concerning this topic. It is important to note that it is a collection of essays rather than of complex and carefully annotated academic papers, a series of stories rather than histories, which nevertheless are logically founded and academically credited. This style of writing research is often a serious challenge to the academia-based contributors but results in a lucid style and language accessible to the broad public. This particular writing style is, besides, one of the great advantages of this book. Indeed, it makes it worth recommending as a basic and introductory piece of reading for any student, with a command of the Danish language, who intends to understand the social question in Denmark in regards to what we have grown accustomed to calling *the welfare state*.

In his attempt to popularise the Danish welfare state and the Danish view of the welfare state, Klaus Petersen invited twelve Danish scholars who were given the task of covering different aspects of the development and merits of Danish social system and policies. These Danish colleagues were asked to explore the most important concepts and explain the phenomenon of the welfare state in their discipline-specific terms. As a result they have – most with success – delivered their argument within two main frameworks.

The first framework, which bears witness to the dominating welfare state research paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s, focuses on structural contingencies of major historical and economic processes. Within this scenario the welfare state has been created as a result of industrialisation, introduction of democracy, or the changes in the capitalistic modes of production. This framework, with its clearly system-theoretical and structural explanatory apparatuses, has found its application in some of the contributions, although the focus is more on the importance of ideas (Lutheranism) and pre-welfare state social institutions (welfare societies and the family).

The second framework focuses on the developers and their rationally made decisions. The solutions devised and applied by individual civil servants, politicians and political parties are seen as the foundation of the welfare state. It is here that social movements of the 1960s, social experts (engineers), and different collective participants are seen as the primary agents of change and the real constructors of the welfare state as we know it today.

As for the individual contributions they mostly meet the expectations of the editor and in a lucid and clear way demonstrate the Danish specificity in the development of social thought and welfare provisions upon which the modern Danish welfare state is founded. Undoubtedly, one such founding

idea is connected with the role of religion in this development being the topic of several contributions, out of which Carsten Selch Jensen's one with his insightful analysis of the role of religion in the construction of the welfare systems in the Middle Ages is one of the more original. In an interesting way he shows the patterns of social marginalisation and how the principle of citizenship-based inclusion, being so characteristic for the welfare programmes of the modern Danish welfare state, was set up. The contribution of Tim Knudsen is of an equally good quality because his clear and well structured essay constructs the links between the Danish universal system and the Lutheran tradition. The particular role of a priest in the local administration appears to be the key for understanding the nature of the Nordic welfare state. However clearly structured, the author sometimes strikes too simplistic tones, which nevertheless do not obstruct the reception. In contrast to these two contributions, which promote the role of religion in the explanation of the welfare state system in Scandinavia, the one written by Uffe Østergård is a less fortunate attempt at clarifying the Lutheran element in the welfare thought. While delivering a sensible analysis of the difference between Calvinism and Lutheranism the contribution fails to deal with its main theme of how the welfare state came along with the Lutheranism as its underlying structure. A somewhat chaotic structure may be the reason why the clear link between the described phenomena is not that obvious.

Karin Lützen points out the causal link between the welfare state and private philanthropy. With a well-founded argument she looks back in 19th-century-Copenhagen to look for patterns of private and institutional members of the public that spread the idea of helping the poor and disabled. Religious motivation played an important role. According to Lützen the basic principle of the Danish (and also Scandinavian) welfare state, i.e. giving help to self-help, has gained a solid basis here. Karin Lützen's contribution closes the religion-based explanations of the welfare state origin and mode of operation.

The next contributions are more compliant with the different and more traditional explanations of the welfare state origin, i.e. they refer to the rising social question and the political parties and groups that put the solution of the social question on their banners. Thus, one reads about the socialist movement's desire to change the society in a more or less revolutionary and socially engineered manner. One also encounters the feminist perspective that in a few interesting paragraphs demonstrates that women's role was not only to adapt to the changes but also in the active shaping of the future structures of the welfare state.

The conclusion of my doctoral thesis *Roots of the Scandinavian Model – Images of Progress in the Era of Modernisation* from 2000 was the following: "Despite the unquestionable success associated with the Swedish and the Scandinavian model, the Danes have neither appreciated nor fully accepted the distinction enjoyed by the Swedes. One manifestation of such an attitude in the late 1970s was that they started using the term Danish model while talking about specifically Nordic solutions for the organisation of society and the economy in the Scandinavian countries." The book, edited by Klaus Petersen, confirms this supposition, which becomes

particularly clear in the contributions of Helle Porsdam about the Danish welfare state in the world and Bo Lidergaard who in an almost ironic way presents the welfare state as a Danish survival strategy.

13 Historier om den Danske Velfærdsstat delivers Danish arguments for the relevance of the Danish welfare state in the Scandinavian and Nordic context. While sporadic references are made to the universality of the Danish welfare state for the Nordic solutions, the book serves the purpose of clarifying the position of the Danish welfare pioneers in the systemic development of the Scandinavian welfare state. It is an important book as it brings back some balance in the general awareness of the social system specific to the Scandinavian countries, which so far has been dominated by an almost unquestioned stereotype of the Swedish model.

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